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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [ETTC](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#) [CU](#)  
SUBJECT: Belarus: Libertad Act

Ref: State 207359

¶1. Summary: The GOB strongly supports the Castro government, publicly opposes the U.S. embargo on Cuba, has no interest in promoting democracy, the protection of human rights or free market reform, and is building economic ties with Cuba. Minsk and Havana in fact became sister cities in November. End summary.

#### No Democracy Promotion among Close Friends

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¶2. Belarus considers Cuba to be one of its few close friends and allies on the world stage, and has no interest in promoting democracy or human rights in Havana. Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly on September 16, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko lashed out at the UN for being manipulated by the U.S. when it raises human rights questions in Belarus and Cuba. He also called for the UN and other countries to oppose American efforts to pressure Cuba and Venezuela, and allow them to "independently determine their own lives."

¶3. On September 12, Lukashenko invited Fidel Castro to visit Minsk, where "we will accord him a welcome fit for the closest and best friend." On November 24, chairman of the Belarusian parliament's Committee on International Affairs Vadim Popov announced Minsk and Havana have excellent political ties and parliamentary relations, and that the two countries always support each other on the international arena. Belarusian Foreign Minister Sergey Martynov visited Cuba in November 2004 and promised continued Belarusian support. These manifestations of friendship pay off for Minsk; on November 28, Cuba became the first country to complete its bilateral talks on Belarus' entry to the WTO.

¶4. Minsk mayor Mikhail Pavlov led a delegation to Cuba October 29 through November 2. While there he established a sister-city relationship between Minsk and Havana. Press reports claim Pavlov met with senior officials from the ministries of construction, transportation, metallurgical industry and machine-building, basic industry, external trade, foreign affairs/foreign investment and economic cooperation, as well as with "other Cuban governmental agencies." A main topic of conversation was the possibility to build a factory in Cuba to assemble Belarusian tractors.

#### Growing Economic Relations

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¶5. As of mid-November, since the beginning of the year Belarus had exported to Cuba: 134 trucks from the Minsk Automobile Factory (MAZ), 42 mining vehicles from the Mogilev Automobile Factory, 24 dump trucks from the Belarusian Automobile Factory (BelAZ), and 37 tractors. Before the end of the year Belarus also intends to ship roughly 200 trucks from the Minsk Tractor Factory (MTZ), 250

engines from the Minsk Motor Plant, and 74 MAZ truck cabs.

16. The GOB announced Belarus exported USD 10.2 million worth of goods to Cuba from January to September, up 88.4% from a year earlier (note: this number does not reflect all the deliveries noted above). Belarus imported USD 7 million worth of goods, mostly raw sugar, from January to September. Even though Lukashenko signed a decree in November 2004 reducing import tariffs for Cuban goods by 25%, Belarusian imports of Cuban goods dropped 76.2% for the first nine months of the year.

PHLIPOT